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Community Service and University Roles: An Action Research Based on the Philosophy of Sufficiency Economy*

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This study employs action research to develop community service through university roles by applying the philosophy of sufficiency economy of His Majesty the King Bhumibol Adulyadej to fulfill villagers' way of life. Participatory learning, seminar, field trip and supervision were employed for strategic plan. Data were collected by participatory observation, questionnaires and interviewing. The findings were explained by qualitative information. Village members perceived their needs in terms of self-reliance community based on participatory learning among university, local governmental organization and village members. The results of this study could be continuously promoted in terms of participatory and action learning based on the employment of the philosophy of sufficiency economy as well.

Keywords: sufficiency economy, self-reliance community, community service, service learning

Introduction

The university is a significant part of social movement in terms of academic support and institutional generalization of theory through instructional practices. Mahasarakham University has a responsibility to serve community that, surrounding by engaging people to fulfill way of life based on the employment of the philosophy of sufficiency economy, was initiated by His Majesty, the King Bhumibol Adulyadej of Thailand. This philosophy is guidance of sustainable economic and social development for more than 30 years for Thai. It is not only guidance for economic and social development, but also extends to cover other aspects of life (National Economic and Social Development Board, 2000).

In Thailand, we cannot deny that the philosophy of sufficiency economy is not just theoretical base, but also realistic evidences are distributed in many regions. As one source of knowledge, university should have responsibility to employ it in both theoretical and practical knowledge implement into community in which surround university service areas. The conception about strengthening community is widely distributed around the world, because of the streaming of globalization. Community that will sustain and continue to develop need more cooperative learning and lesson learned in a various kind of effective practices.

This study sets strategic plan to engage village members to learn to improve yourself and leads their community in terms of community self-reliance that were participatory learning, seminar, field trip and

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supervision. The study will develop community self-reliance through participatory and action learning by engaging village members to understand the philosophy of sufficiency economy, implement and also apply them to sustaining their community in the globalization era. University level acts as a facilitator and a supporter based on creation of Networking (see Figure 1).

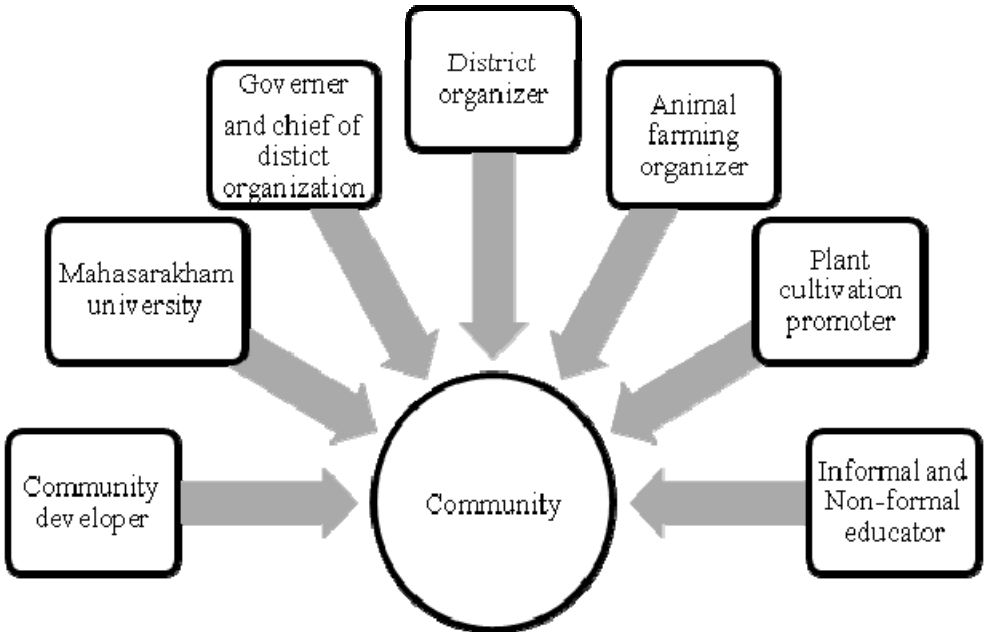


Figure 1. Networking to engage community self-reliance.

As this point, Mahasarakham University has launched project “One Faculty, One Community”. This project tries to engage village members to live together based on belief that, if community is strengthened, university will also be served by strength of community. The community service should be incorporated community, university and community should be generalized into theory and agreed to sustainable development by action learning (Jackson, 2010). This study aims to employs action research to develop self-reliance community by applying the philosophy of sufficiency economy of His Majesty, the King Bhumibol Adulyadej to fulfilling villagers’ way of life.

An action research is a key to develop self-reliance community, because it promotes inquiry process of community-based development (Ferriera & Gendron, 2011). The framework of development focused on how village members perceive the philosophy of sufficiency economy and then apply it appropriately to way of life. The community needs were assessed by interviewing village members and small group meetings. They raised an initiative choice to begin with the philosophy of sufficiency economy by duck and fish farming. Also, local governmental organization extremely agreed to support their needs. University can support community in such academic dimension and other facilities as much as community required.

We proposed an action research design (Kemmis & McTaggart, 1988) to assist strength community in terms of serving self-reliance community based on applying the philosophy of sufficiency economy. It is an interpretive process to extend and clarify people’s understanding of issues, assist them in identifying priorities, and define solution of action. Also, it defined as an emergent inquiry process in which applied behavioral science knowledge is integrated with existing organizational knowledge and applied to solving real problems

(Shani & Pasmore, 1985).

For this reason, we employed action research to generate needs and solution of action to assist village members in making strength community by taking action to promote community change (Greenwood & Levin, 1998) and to empower community groups so that they become better-organized and more proficient advocates for themselves and their constituents, as well as better able to control the resources that will contribute to their further development (Strand, Marullo, Cutforth, Stoecker, & Donohue, 2003; Coghlan & Brannick, 2010). The results of this study will promote self-reliant community by advocating for the replacement of existing forms of social organization and sharing the power of knowledge creation with communities outside of researchers and policy makers.

Methodology

Community Context

The target community is located not far from Mahasarakham University, five km of distance to visit and monitor how community makes a self-reliant community apply the philosophy of sufficiency economy to fulfilling villagers' way of life. Baan Khee Nue was engaged in promoting and participating in this project. Two hundred years ago, the ancient of village settler immigrated from Baan Moiwadee, Amphoe Kamalasai, Kalasin Province and Baan See-than, Amphoe Muang, Roi-Et Province. The origin name of village emerged from a geographical place with plenty of bamboo. Four water reservoirs are important natural resources in which villagers serve for their agricultural practices and other purposes.

Most of them employ occupation to offer community member to paddy rice filed owner, animal farm and general services. Heet Sib Song Kong Sib See is called for tradition and norm which should be respected. It influenced their ways of life and leaded village members to learn to live with others. Buddhism is a major religion that they believe and sustain to serve their life and community. Two temples located not far from village, because ceremony-based Heet Sib Song Kong Sib See needs monk practices and temple activities annually.

Strategic Plan

Participatory observation. Participatory observation was a period of beginning study that villagers learned to make Networking and community cooperation by visiting community and generating villagers' opinion on how to make community self-reliance. Twilight talk was employed with community leaders on how to engage the philosophy of sufficiency economy and how to implement it as well as community could do. Data were recorded and analyzed from the community needs based on possible ways. First time of talking seems to simply contact with small group of community leaders in which mobile phones is invited. At the second time, researchers visit directly community leaders as well as twilight talk. Also, more than four times later, community data were recorded and explained in terms of qualitative information.

Seminar. Seminar was the way to develop villagers, participatory learning and observation, which reflected really needs. They needed more knowledge about the philosophy of sufficiency economy, theoretical explanation, and practical model which should be introduced. The small-group meeting invited community leaders, university leaders and the representatives of local governmental organization to generate ideas by using service learning. The community leaders and representatives accepted the seminar which local governmental organization supported in both knowledge and practical views. Two days of seminar was established, and data were collected by videotape recorded, interview and observation.

Field trip. Field trip was not only seminar in the program of study, but also allowed village members to have realistic view. Two visiting sites provided villagers in terms of how to apply the philosophy of sufficiency economy to appropriate choices. Baan Hinpoon and Thiengna Kroonoi are representatives of theoretical practices. Data were collected by questionnaires and interviewing.

Supervision. It is difficult to describe supervision as a catalyst of development program. Supervision conducts monthly to explore how villagers keep their success and learn best things. Duck and fish farming were visited, and also small group discussion was employed during the supervision day. Data were collected by interviewing and observation.

Procedural Study

The president of Mahasarakham University provided policy to all faculty and organization units which serve for community strength by launching project, "One Faculty, One Community". Community leaders of Baan Khee accepted to develop their community and propose their needs. Twilight talk and small group meeting were employed by aiming at generating what villagers really need in terms of community self-reliance based on the philosophy of sufficiency economy. Local governmental organizations are target groups of working through Networking. In conclusion, village members need duck and fish farming, learning by their best action learning. However, theory is still necessary to perform holistic view and learn by participatory action learning.

Table 1

Action Plan

Activity	Collective data	Target
Community survey	Observation Note-taking Inter-viewing	Community developers Community leaders Target villagers
Participatory learning	Observation Note-taking Inter-viewing Taking photograph	Community leaders Target villagers
Small group discussion	Observation Note-taking Inter-viewing	Community developers Animal farming organizers District organizers Plant cultivation promoters University lecturers Informal and non-formal educators Villagers Informal and non-formal educators
Seminar	Observation Note-taking Inter-viewing	Community developers Animal farming organizers District organizers Plant cultivation promoters Villagers
Field trip	Observation Note-taking Inter-viewing	Community developers Animal farming organizers District organizers Plant cultivation promoters Villagers
Supervision	Observation Note-taking Inter-viewing	Community developers Animal farming organizers District organizers Plant cultivation promoters Villagers

Target village was selected by community survey based on the readiness and possibility of participated community. Bann Khee showed that village members needed to develop their community by setting two projects which were relevant to the philosophy of sufficiency economy. Also, the purpose of the meeting for community leader and researchers is to clarify the research plan which matches office of general education's strategy plan—strategy 2: to enrich competency and personal working abilities, and also Mahasarakham University's strategy plan—strategy 4: to serve academic based on participation among university, society, community and local areas. The action plan can be shown in Table 1.

This research spent 12 months in Mahasarakham University to service community through the action research, also sustaining collaborated Networking as located in Mahasarakham province. Data were gathered by various kinds of data sources. The findings were explained by qualitative information.

Findings

Target village is developed and moved forwarded by employing the philosophy of sufficiency economy. The policy "One Faculty, One Community" indicates that higher education can integrate academic aspect to serve community as well. As needs emerged from community, university takes a responsibility to serve possible things and learn from local to higher wisdom:

> … Our village needs to have duck and fish farms, because it is easy, we have been learned how to do that for three years… if university will take responsibility to serve us, we are very appreciated to do, but we have no more knowledge and technology to manipulate…

Community leaders provide information about traditional practices in which they had. How to help them? What are tools for developing? The questions were emerged and we have to use participatory action to learn to make self-reliant community. Small group discussion is an initial tool to find a shortcut of possible answers. Also, memorandum of understanding between university and community helps us reach the goal of study more easily.

Experts in any field agreed to participate and then to make understanding by seminar at temple of Bann Khee. Animal farming organizers, district organizers and plant cultivation promoters are key persons to provide understandings. The data were described as follows:

> Community development is good to us, philosophy of sufficiency economy is suit for community, but it is not sustain if we abandon it.

Village members do not like to take a writing, informal observation and asking which is important tools for collecting information. Even though village members are familiar with seminar based on requirement of community leader, they still need to share new experiences:

> I have ever participated seminar established by community leader, but we need to know and learn more how to hit the goal of philosophy of sufficiency economy.

After seminar, field trip is allowed them to meet best practices from two cases. Village members were traveling by university bus to learn how Bann Hin Poon and Thieng na Kroo Noi employ philosophy of sufficiency economy to real practices.

> I will develop myself first, do it first, and learn from practical ways.

We can see how to manipulate community enterprise and unity will lead us to a successful.

University should be continuously projected, because we have learned too much about ways of life based on sufficiency economy.

Village members propose their ideas to conduct fish and duck farm in terms of cooperative and learn to solve their problem by themselves. University supported and facilitated supervision as much as possible. They are happy to talk and discuss about their activities more than past, also, changing their attitude towards university in positive point. Higher education can serve community, not far from community ways and knowledge can be transferred by no direction within outer and inner community.

It is not surprised when Networking was created and developed. Governmental organization is familiar with working individually and less talking with other organizations. Collateral education is important in the age of globalization for university when community perceived that horizontal education was university's image. In this study, it is showed that university can change roles from the academic provider to the academic supporter and from facilitator to community.

Discussion and Conclusions

The findings of this research help us to understand much more processes of teaching and learning in terms of informal education and also university roles to support community. The framework for exploring is a broader base of community perceptions and university skills for developing community engagement. The action research has potential for building university-community supports for practical action. Also, Networking in which traditional practices did not make holistic action, but this research can help us to meet requirements in both community and other governmental organizations units which need to solve problem by the same point. As such the process could be used by engaged community stakeholders, giving them a sense of ownership of the practical outcomes (Webb & Burgin, 2009). Community service should be incorporated at political and pedagogical solution through higher education that will change community learning (Butin, 2006).

The role of university that engaged scholarship and service learning in particular, plays in linking students' academic learning with practical experiences in the community. Also, making a connection with other organizations to fulfill philosophy of sufficiency economy as crucial criteria, village members can take a role to be good learners. They know what are really needs to develop skills and what university has to support in terms of scholars and related knowledge (Berle, 2006; Deal, 2006). Integrating community service into the university curriculum involves a pedagogical strategy and service learning which will help students to learn civic engagement.

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